THE

RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. IV. February 25, 1938 Adar I, 24, 5698 No. 1.

EDITORIALS

WILL IT BE INK OR ACTION?

PROFANING THE SYNAGOGUE

JESUS AND HIS MODERN KINSMAN

By Robert Gordis

THE ZIONIST SITUATION IN AMERICA

By Samuel M. Blumenfield

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The Reconstructionist Enters Upon Its Fourth Year of Publication and Reiterates Its Adherence to the Platform Originally Set Forth in Its First Issue, Summarized Below:

WE approach our task from the point of view of Judaism as a religious civilization. We envisage Judaism as the proper concern of all Jews, religious and unreligious, conservative and radical. . . .

IN affirming that Judaism is a civilization we give emphasis to the fact that it includes . . . communal organization, language, law, art, *mores,* customs, as well as religion. Moreover, all of these elements are organically related to one another; to omit any of them is to distort Judaism. All of them are functions of the group life of Israel and cannot be maintained unless we maintain the unity and integrity of the Jewish people and the continuity of its spiritual efforts.

WE believe that the material and spiritual welfare of the Jews can be achieved only through Jewish communal organization. . . . We favor the establishment of Jewish communal life in America, democratically administered and organized in such a manner as to include all Jews who wish to identify themselves with the Jewish people, regardless of what their personal philosophy may be.

IN affirming that Judaism is a *religious* civilization, we recognize first, the historic fact that the God idea has dominated the entire pattern of Jewish life in the past, and that continuity with our past is impossible without giving to religion a position, if not of primacy, at least of *primus inter pares;* and secondly, the social fact that a mature and complete civilization is bound to find expression in the idea of God and in forms of religious worship in which the hopes and ideals of human life are rendered articulate. It is that very sense of need for religion that impels us to reinterpret the traditional beliefs in keeping with what for us must be a tenable world outlook, and to revise and develop the traditional usages in keeping with spiritual needs which we can genuinely experience.

WE consider the establishment of Palestine indispensable to the life of Judaism in the diaspora. We seek to enable Jewish civilization so to root itself in the soil of Palestine as to make of the land the cultural center for Israel's intellectual and spiritual rebirth. We oppose any attempt to render Palestine the object of imperialist aims or the victim of private profit-seeking. We endorse every effort toward the establishment of a cooperative commonwealth in Palestine based upon social justice and social cooperation. . . .

WE are opposed to Fascism in every form. We object to any philosophy of government which seeks to curtail the rights of individuals to the free pursuit of personal salvation through participation in any religious or cultural activity, or through affiliation with any national or ethnic group. . . . Recognizing the horror and irrationality of war as a means of adjusting conflicting interests, we shall support every effort looking to the perfection of machinery for the peaceful adjudication of such conflicts and to the utilization of such machinery as exists, wherever possible. Under no circumstances shall we give countenance or support to an imperialistic war that is designed to advance the interests of exploiting and oppressing classes.

SOCIAL righteousness is possible only upon the estabishment of a cooperative society, the elimination of the profit system, and the public ownership of all natural resources and basic industries. Until these objectives are achieved our sympathies and our support go to labor in its struggle with its employers for a more equitable distribution of the income of industry, and in the assertion of its right to organize for the protection of its interests without interference from its employers.

—*From "The Reconstructionist," January* 11, 1935

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EDITORIALS

Will It Be Ink Or Action?

THE Independent Order of B'nai B'rith is to be commended for its continuous interest in the problems of Jewish economic adjustment. At the last annual meeting of the Executive Committee of the Order held in New Orleans recently it voted to establish a vocational service bureau for youth. The news item carried a further note to the effect that the purpose of this bureau would be to give attention to *group* vocational guidance rather than to *individual* personnel work.

Before commenting further on the significance and value of such an undertaking, a few fundamental principles should be underscored:

1. The problem of Jewish economic adjustment cannot be satisfactorily attacked by attention merely on one front. Diversified efforts must be concentrated on many fronts simultaneously.

2. These differing approaches and methods must be soundly coordinated. Effective work in one area must not be vitiated by inept performance in another. Of what value is an excellent program of vocational guidance if this activity is not correlated with a similarly excellent program of vocational education, locating openings, placement, etc.?

3. No plan in this field is of any substantial value unless based on a significant body of facts. But many of these facts change from day to day. Thus, unless provision is made for rapid adjustments to swiftly changing conditions, a program may become quite unrealistic, academic and impractical.

4. No Jewish economic adjustment program will be fundamentally far-reaching and lastingly effective if concern is directed exclusively to physical survival and only to economic well-being. The right to survive inevitably is tied up with the query: "survive how?", "survive for what?" True, Jewish survival should not base its justification only on answers to these questions, but we cannot maintain that we live by bread alone. Economic adjustment programs cannot therefore function in isolation from a total program of Jewish adjustment, social and cultural, as well as economic.

5. Vocational services cannot be limited to local groups, nor to local facilities and opportunities. Any plan to be sound and most practical must be at least regional, and more desirably national in scope and coverage. This involves problems of occupational redistribution with geography as the major factor in the situation. A person may be occupationally dislocated in New York City but not in Chehalis, Washington.

6. Any plans of wide national coverage, to avoid being dilettante, must not alone cover the needs of Jewish youth

but those outside of the age ranges of sixteen to twenty-five. Those who have actually been involved in any phase of the vocational guidance, adjustment and placement program know how basic this fact is.

These are but a few major considerations which must be kept in mind in launching any new enterprise to deal with the problems of Jewish vocational adjustment. As in many other fields of Jewish social welfare, there is no absence of interest in, no lack of awareness of what troubles us,—but what a plethora of organizations, what a welter of disconnected, and, in the last analysis, futile efforts confront us!

An important national Jewish organization like the B'nai B'rith is in an unusually strategic position to be a national coordinator, to aid in building order out of the current chaos. At the present moment it can be most helpful in rendering a specific service. This specific service is *not* in the direction of preparing pamphlets, booklets or other similar matter to add to the already existing mass of inchoate printed material. It *can* be extremely helpful as a *promoter* of plans and programs local, regional and national, which will help bind together scattered and isolated experiments, each nibbling away ineffectively at a very limited portion of the great problem of Jewish economic and industrial maladjustment.

Will the B'nai B'rith just print more brochures warning against entering the overcrowded professions, issue more booklets giving job-analyses of occupations not yet overfilled? Will it make available mimeographed outlines on courses young people should take in order that the Jews of this country may soon demonstrate a "normal"(?) distribution in some ten thousand different occupations? Or will it do a more significant and substantial job?

If it has the intelligent leadership to see clearly its possible contribution to the present urgent problems of Jewish economic adjustment it will be able to answer satisfactorily the question: Will it be just some more ink, or greatly needed action?

Profaning The Synagogue

ONE of the largest of the state presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church of America recently went on record condemning the use of gambling devices to raise funds for religious purposes. As quoted in "Religion in the News," a presentation of the National Broadcasting Company, the resolution of the Presbyterians reads in part, "If the church cannot maintain itself financially without resorting to questionable and undignified methods, then its spiritual influence is of dubious value."

These biting words rankle in us, because synagogues have been as guilty, as have churches, of the offense. There are Jewish congregations the budgets of which are, to no small extent, dependent upon the income from weekly or fortnightly bingo games or from other familiar forms of gambling. That such a procedure is undignified is immediately apparent. The standards of good taste of our ancient ancestors seem to have been higher than ours in this respect. They forebade themselves to bring the money derived from the sale of a dog as an offering to the sanctuary. What is more, it is inevitable that people of good taste must be alienated from the Synagogue by such devices.

The proponents of such methods of fund-raising argue that, if people will gamble in any case, they may as well gamble for a good cause, that without such devices congregations will not be able to meet their budgets, that evenings of games of chance bring people into the synagogues who would otherwise never enter them and that, though the means are admittedly doubtful, they are justified by the ends.

None of these arguments impresses us. If the synagogue were to endure everything that people will do in any event, it will be left with no moral standards

at all. We feel, as do the Presbyterians, that where budgets cannot be met otherwise, they might just as well not be met. As for the people who can be drawn into the synagogue only by such means, we are skeptical whether they will in this way be won to the religious aspect of Judaism to which the house of worship is dedicated. And as for the ends justifying the means, a good end attained by a bad means is always corrupted by the instruments used in its attainment.

We Reconstructionists are frequently accused of being secularists, although we have always maintained that Judaism is a religious civilization. Because we would vest the control of Jewish life in a democratically organized Jewish community from which the congregationally unaffiliated are not excluded, and because we stress the secular as well as the religious interests of Jews, we are frequently tagged with the secularist label. Strange to say, the Jews who profess to be shocked by the secularism of the Reconstructionist movement have rarely been known to protest against the profanation of the synagogue through its dependence on gambling and on the sale of entertainment that represents, to put the case mildly, the lowest common denominator of social intercourse. Apparently, a discussion of serious social problems in a Jewish Community Center or among a Jewish labor group is "secular" but bingo played in a synagogue building or for the maintenance of a synagogue is "religious."

Reconstructionism stands for the sacredness of the synagogue. It views the synagogue as that organ of the Jewish community whose specific function it is to keep Jews sensitized to Jewish religious values. If the synagogue is to fulfill this function, everything that it does or that is done in its behalf must be in keeping with this purpose. Whatever we may think of gambling itself, whether we consider it a vice or an innocent pastime, it must be apparent that the same institution cannot dispense both that sort of entertainment and the values with which religion enriches life. Means must be appropriate to ends or they defeat those ends. If Jews want the synagogue and what it stands for, let them support it for what it is worth and not for the cheap and vulgar entertainment that, in some instance, it is prepared to sell. The Reconstructionist still identifies God with the spirit "that distinguishes between the holy and the profane."

Jesus and His Modern Kinsman

By Robert Gordis*

I

RELIGIOUS controversy is sterile and unprofitable, as the vast, dreary stretches of medieval disputations amply attest. Nevertheless, the very sincere plea which Mr. John Cournos addresses to his fellow-Jews ("Epistle to the Jews"—Atlantic Monthly, December, 1937) deserves an equally candid reply. For, undoubtedly, many intelligent Christians share his perplexity on the Jewish attitude toward Jesus. Mr. Cournos contends that the time has come for the leaders of Jewry to come forth with a complete avowal that the ultimate implications of Jewish teaching are to be found in the words of Jesus. "The great Jewish transgression consists of the refusal to accept the ultimate expression of the Jewish genius which leads inevitably from Moses to Christ, from tribalism to universalism, from formalism to freedom." Jews should accept Jesus not as a God but as the God-man, as a human being of perfect character or, more specifically, as the greatest of the Hebrew Prophets.

That acceptance is dictated not only by

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the love of truth, Mr. Cournos believes, but by practical considerations as well. The rising tide of anti-Semitism against which modern Jews are fighting a desperate battle is by no means solely economic. Its roots are religious, and it can be overcome only by the Jewish acceptance of Jesus. Thus truth and expediency unite in urging that room be found for Jesus in the life of the people from which he sprang.

It is true that for two thousand years Jews have suffered every indignity and torment rather than accept Christianity. Yet that stubborn resistance may have been mistaken, and a more modern and tolerant view may be possible today. The dead past, however heroic, should not deflect us from the truth. Has the time come for the Jewish people to accept Jesus?

II

The first question that arises is: Which Jesus are they to accept? Dr. Cournos dismisses this problem lightly by saying that Jesus is clearly known to us from the Gospels and Acts. Unfortunately, his assurance is not shared by all serious students of the subject. Innumerable scholars have toiled for centuries in an effort to reconcile the contradictory descriptions of Jesus given by the sources and to reconstruct him as he actually was. The Gospels disagree as to his parentage and ancestry, the place of his birth, the character of his activity and the time of his death. But the differences go far beyond the external facts of his life. One cannot derive from the Gospels any consistent view as to how Jesus looked upon himself, whether as a Rabbi, a Prophet, the Messiah, the Son of God or, what seems impossible for a Jew, as God himself.

This central problem as to what Jesus considered himself to be is by no means the only one which remains insoluble. It is usually assumed that in Jesus we pass from formalism to freedom. By this is meant that he opposed the keeping of the Law and particularly the ritual commandments of Judaism. Yet in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declares, "Whosoever shall break one of the least commandments and shall teach men so shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven," and he repeats that "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than for one tittle of the Law to fall."

It is true that this traditional attitude toward the Law is contradicted by other passages which express equally radical views, as in the striking parable, "No man putteth a piece of new garment on an old, and no man putteth new wine into old bottles." That, however, merely adds to our difficulty in understanding Jesus' actual views on the subject.

Mr. Cournos says that in passing from Judaism to Jesus one goes from tribalism to universalism. This statement, which is frequently repeated, is far from doing justice to the tradition we find in the Gospels. In sending his disciples forth Jesus expressly says, "Go not into the way of Gentiles and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not, but go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Nor would any Prophet or Rabbi have expressed himself in as uncompromising a manner as did Jesus in the incident of the Canaanitish woman, who begs him to heal her daughter. At first, he ignores her request, repeating, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel." As she persists in her importunities, he answers her, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." Only when she cleverly turns the parable upon him, "Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table," does he comply with her request.

It is because of contradictions such as these which affect not only the external facts of his life, but the very essence of his teaching that no two Lives of Jesus are alike. Each scholar has created Christ in his own image, selecting those traits that pleased him and ignoring the rest. The problem as to what Jesus Jews are to accept is by no means as simple as Mr. Cournos believes.

III

Even if this obstacle be overcome, a greater one still remains: On what terms

is he to be accepted? Mr. Cournos recognizes that for the Jew he cannot be either God or the Son of God. No less emphatically, he cannot be the Messiah, for the nineteen hundred years that have elapsed since his tragic death have given little evidence of the peace and brotherhood of the Messianic age. The Savior is still to appear among men.

Mr. Cournos therefore pleads that Jews acknowledge him as the perfect man who towers above the Prophets that preceded him. Here is the rub of the matter. No one can fail to be stirred to reverence by the nobility of Jesus' life and thought. Nevertheless, Jews are honestly unable to recognize in Jesus "the ultimate expression of the Jewish genius," or describe him as the greatest of the prophets of Israel.

Contrasts between the tribalism and formalism of the Old Testament and the universalism and freedom of the New are easy enough to draw. One has merely to place the lower elements of the Old Testament by the side of the best of Jesus' teaching. That is as false as the reverse process would be, as one of the most sympathetic Jewish students of Jesus, C. G. Montefiore, has graphically demonstrated in an eloquent passage in his Synoptic Gospels (Vol. 2, p. 326):

> Such passages as Matt. XXV. 41 should make theologians excessively careful of drawing beloved contrasts between Old Testament and New. We find even the liberal theologian Dr. Fosdick saying: "From Sinai to Calvary—was ever a record of progressive revelation more plain or more convincing? The development begins with Jehovah disclosed in a thunder storm on a desert mountain, and it ends with Christ saying: 'God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth'; it begins with a war-god leading his partisans to victory, and it ends with men saying, 'God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him'; it begins with a provincial Deity, loving his tribe and hating its enemies, and it ends with the God of the whole earth worshiped by a 'great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues'; it begins with a God who commands the slaying of the Amalekites, 'both man and woman, infant and suckling,' and it ends with a Father whose will it is that not 'One of these little ones should perish'": it begins with God's people standing afar off from His lightnings and praying that He might not speak to them lest they die, and it ends with men going into their chambers, and, having shut the door, praying to their Father who is in secret." ("Christianity and Progress," p. 209.)
>
> Very good. No doubt such a series can be arranged. Let me now arrange a similar series. From Old Testament to New Testament—was ever a record of retrogression more plain or more convincing? It begins with, 'Have I any pleasure at all in the death of him that dieth,' it ends with, 'Begone from me, ye doers of wickedness.' It begins with, 'The Lord is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy'; it ends with, 'Fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.' It begins with, 'I dwell with him that is of a contrite spirit to revive it'; it ends with, 'Narrow is the way which leads to life, and few there be who find it.' It begins with, 'I will not contend for ever; I will not be always worth'; it ends with, 'Depart, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire.' It begins with, 'Should not I have pity upon Nineveh, the great city?'; it ends with, 'It will be more endurable for Sodom on the day of Judgment than for that city.' It begins with, 'The Lord is good to all, and near to all who call upon him'; it ends with, 'Whosoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, there is no forgiveness for him whether in this world or the next.' It begins with, 'The Lord will wipe away tears from off all faces; he will death destroy for ever'; it ends with, 'They will throw them into the furnace of fire; there is the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.' And the one series would be as misleading as the other.

IV

In sum, the best of Jesus' teaching is on the same high level as the noblest utterances of Judaism. That there are less valuable elements in his doctrine as there are in the Old Testament is only natural. In analyzing Jesus' teaching our purpose is not to minimize his greatness, but to indicate why he does not seem to Jews to command a transcendental position.

Modern students of the life of Jesus are recognizing increasingly that the key to his outlook is to be found in his faith that the natural order would be destroyed in his own life-time and a supernatural Kingdom of God be ushered in by his agency. It therefore followed that all purely mundane concerns were of no account. Hence the ascetic note which meets us in such utterances as Mat. XIX, 12 and elsewhere, which Paul accentuated. Jesus had scant use for family life. His own mother he addresses, "Woman,

what have I to do with thee?" and refuses to let one of his disciples attend his father's funeral. His rigorous attitude against divorce, which Judaism did not share, has been surrendered by most modern men as inimical to human welfare. He has no use for science and regards wealth, no matter how honestly acquired, as sinful. Because he expected the speedy collapse of the natural order, Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth, finds no value in labor and says, "He who putteth his hand to the plow and looketh backward is not fit for the Kingdom of Heaven."

It is for the same reason, that he concentrates entirely upon the salvation of the individual, and lacks the most distinctive mark of the Hebrew prophets,—their social consciousness. There is little, if any, of a social Gospel in Jesus. One of the most beautiful and touching traits in his personality is his genuine affection for the poor. Yet nowhere do we hear the flaming words of protest against the maldistribution of wealth and the consequent debauchery of the rich and degradation of the poor, such words of protest as are the eternal glory of Amos and Isaiah.

Jesus had no interest in the political problems of his day, for his Kingdom was not of this world. Though he saw his countrymen goaded to desperation by the Roman oppressors, he had no encouragement or comfort to give them. When asked whether they should continue to pay tribute money to Rome, he answered, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." We find little evidence in his words of the prophetic conception of God in history, that all nations play their part in the human drama in accordance with a divine purpose and goal.

Whether because of his eschatology, or for other reasons, Jesus' teaching lacks all the salient features of Hebrew prophecy at its best, its social zeal, its political maturity, its international outlook. There is little in his entire ethic which is collective. The importance of a noble personal morality cannot be overestimated, but it is obvious today that it cannot suffice us. If humanity is to find salvation, we need the application of the prophetic ideals of justice, freedom and peace to economic, political and international affairs, areas which Jesus never touched.

V

The unique greatness of his teaching lies in his ethic for the individual. As a moral guide teaching the virtues of kindness, forgiveness and truth to men and women he was unrivaled. Through his beautiful parables and trenchant sayings he was able to express great truths in eternally compelling fashion. Yet Jesus himself knew that he was no innovator.

When asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" he quoted two passages out of the Law, " 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul and all thy might.' That is the first Commandment, and the second, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' " He thus agreed completely with the two greatest Pharisaic teachers, Hillel and Akiba, who selected these very verses as the essence of their religion. The Lord's Prayer, which goes back to Jesus, is completely Jewish in ideas and phraseology. The Sermon on the Mount is a compilation of his sayings which can be paralleled line by line from the Old Testament and Rabbinical literature, as can be seen in Strack and Billerbeck's great Commentary on the New Testament based on the Talmud and Midrash.

There is novelty in Jesus' teaching, but it resides not in what he said, but in how he said it and in what he left unsaid. When Jesus was accosted, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" he quoted the six ethical commandments of the Decalogue. "Do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not kill, do not bear false witness, defraud not, honor thy father and thy mother." He thus singled out the ethical element of Judaism as the sum total of his teaching, and permitted the rest of the Law to fall into decline. Undoubtedly, he thus helped to focus attention upon ethics as the heart of religion,

a truth which the masses might overlook, but which all Jewish teachers united in emphasizing.

The Rabbis believed that the ritual commandments were important because they served "to purify and ennoble human nature." Jesus felt that they could safely be neglected. Without reopening the ancient controversy about law and freedom, it may be noted that the existence of the Christian Church as an institution with rites and laws proves that there is some merit in the so-called "legalism" of the Rabbis. Ideals need tangible embodiment to survive in human life.

With profound reverence for the nobility of Jesus' life and the best of his teaching, Jews cannot honestly accept him within the authoritative body of their religious tradition. For though he was a Jew to his dying day, he did not contribute to the life of his people, its religious ideals, or its faith in its destiny. His ethical teaching for the individual, exalted as it is, is no more than a superb restatement of what Judaism already possesses. On the other hand, in its ascetic spirit, and its lack of a social consciousness, his doctrine suffers from defects from which Judaism is largely free.

While Christians will naturally interpret the facts otherwise, is it too much to hope that they will recognize that the Jewish inability to accept Jesus is based upon the truth as Jews honestly see it?

VI

The second argument for the acceptance of Jesus, is that it would ease the rigors of anti-Jewish prejudice. One is, however, permitted to doubt whether the wholesale conversion of Jews to some liberal Christian cult would diminish anti-Semitism. It was pointed out long ago that if Jews and Christians were to unite on a common religion, they would still disagree as to how much each tradition contributed to the new Faith.

Acceptance of Jesus as a Prophet by Jews would merely convince devout Christians that only obstinacy prevented Jews from going further and accepting his divinity. This is no mere *a priori* reasoning. It is based on facts.

At the end of the eighteenth century a leading German Jew, who had absorbed the ideas of the Enlightenment, David Friedlander, wrote an anonymous letter to the leading Protestant minister of Berlin, Teller, offering to accept Christianity for himself and certain heads of Jewish families, if they would be excused from believing some of the more extreme Christian dogmas. The minister promptly refused the offer in a noble and severe reply. Recently when a liberal Rabbi preached an appreciative sermon on Jesus a local minister took him at his word and offered to baptize him to the true Faith.

Moreover, anti-Semitism today, Mr. Cournos to the contrary notwithstanding, is not predominantly religious. There is no need to multiply words to prove that the spear head of anti-Semitism—Fascism, especially the German brand, is almost equally violent in its anti-Christian bias today. It is a truism that anti-Jewish prejudice is deeply rooted in the economic ills of our generation.

In the tragedy which has overtaken modern Germany, the harassed Jews are not the most pathetic group. That position is occupied by the so-called "Non-Aryan" Christians, the descendants of Jewish converts and the offspring of intermarriage. For generations they have been Christians in spirit and in truth. Today under the lash of Nazi fury they find themselves unwilling martyrs to a cause which is not theirs. But even where anti-Semitism is less violent, it will not be overcome through the Jews' acceptance of Jesus.

VII

What, in essence, is the attitude of modern Jews toward Jesus? He is a sublime moral teacher who through his gift of beautiful utterance served to popularize the ethical ideals of Judaism throughout the world. Jesus and the religion which grew about him have indeed become a light to the nations, bringing the prophetic ideals of jutsice, love and peace

to every corner of the world. The great Maimonides, in the Middle Ages, succinctly summarized the basic Jewish attitude to the Founder of Christianity. "Thanks to these new religions, the world has been filled with the words of the Law and the Commandments and these words have now been spread to the farthest islands and the outermost nations."

Christianity has been the instrument for bringing the ethical treasures of Judaism to mankind. Jesus, who was a child of Israel and the father of Christianity, is thus a perpetual reminder that the two great faiths have a common basis and a common goal. There is no need for either to conquer or absorb the other. They have many differences, but they have much more in common. They can both justify themselves to God and man only by cleaving to the ideals enunciated by the Prophets and by Jesus. For if, in our day, while the future of civilization trembles in the balance, religion wastes its substance in quarreling over its differences, there will be none to pray: "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do."

The Zionist Situation in America

By Samuel M. Blumenfield*

[This memorandum was prepared by Rabbi Blumenfield at the request of a number of leading Chicago Zionists. They asked him to outline a constructive program for further activity. The statement that follows is an evaluation of the Zionist situation based upon observation, investigation of records and inquiries through personal conferences with men and women who have been active in the Zionist movement in Chicago. These observations, although primarily concerned with the Chicago situation, reflect the fortunes of the movement at large. This memorandum, therefore, although dealing with a local problem, should be of interest and value to Zionists throughout the country—Ed.]

I

The Problem

ONE need not go far to discover that Zionist membership and Zionist activity do not reflect the actual strength of Zionism in this country. Many of us have for a number of years noticed the peculiar phenomenom of a growing movement and a shrinking organization. This could be well demonstrated were we merely to consider events in Jewish life during the past year. In the year 1937 the Central Conference of American Rabbis went on record at its annual convention with the declaration: "We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in Palestine's upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life." The same year the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, representing a membership of about 55,000, resolved that: "The time has now come for all Jews, irrespective of ideological differences, to unite in the activities leading to the establishment of the Jewish homeland in Palestine and we urge our constituency to give their financial and moral support to the work of rebuilding Palestine." During the same year the National B'nai B'rith, representing 75,000 members, actually contributed to the most Zionist of Zionist funds, the Jewish National Fund, the sum of $100,000. But in spite of these declarations and contributions, the Z.O.A. in 1937, after strenuous efforts, having utilized the revered name of Brandeis for its membership drive, could muster only 27,144 members.

I have purposely cited the case of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the B'nai B'rith, for their declarations and actions are the most recent manifestations of how deeply Zion-

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ism has struck root in American Jewish life. It would be superfluous to enumerate the hundreds of religious, social, and fraternal organizations, representing hundreds of thousands of Jews throughout the country, which have on many previous occasions expressed their complete sympathy with Zionist ideals and have cooperated in the drives for Zionist funds. The best commentary on these recent manifestations is the lack of commentary on the part of the Jewish press following the resolutions of both the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, for, by now, it is taken for granted that any organization with a positive attitude towards Jewry and Judaism would support the cause of Zion.

With such abundant data testifying to the mass character of Zionist interest and sympathy, it is evident that 27,144 paid Zionists do not in the least represent the true state of affairs of Zionism in America. What is true of the country at large seems to be clearly demonstrated in the city of Chicago. Lawndale, with a Jewish population of about 85,000, has yielded for the last ten years an average Zionist membership of 105; Albany Park, with a population of 45,000,—69; Northwest Side, with a population of 30,000, —85; Hyde Park, with a population of 30,000,—87. The entire city of Chicago, whose Jewish population equals in numbers that of Palestine, can show for the same period of ten years, an average membership of 1,000 or ¼ of one per cent of the entire Jewish population.

What makes the recital of Zionist realities particularly discouraging is the fact that even this limited membership does not represent activity or interest commensurate with its numerical strength, for just as these numbers underestimate the force of Zionism they overestimate the strength of the Zionist Organization. One has yet to find an organization in Chicago of any consequence as devoid of any sense of discipline or loyalty as the Zionist Organization. Out of a membership of 1,253 in 1937, only about 200 turned out to listen to such a world Zionist figure as Dr. Mossinsohn; only about 60 people (and not all of them members of the Z.O.) responded to the invitation of their officers to listen to Dr. Margolin, the founder of the Pedagogical Institute for Biology in Tel Aviv. Several years have gone by without a Herzl Memorial meeting, simply because the Zionist Organization could not muster sufficient response among its members even for this traditional Zionist function.

At an Executive meeting that I attended, out of a membership of 80, only 6 were present. (I was told that when the regular invitation is followed up by personal telephone calls the attendance may go up to 20.) Only two Zionists were interested in meeting with the National Educational Director of the Z.O.A., when he visited Chicago.

Even more serious than the lack of activity is the intense feeling of dissatisfaction that I found among Chicago Zionists. Of all the Zionists that I interviewed, not one had a kind word to say for the Zionist Organization. Complaints, resentment and bitterness were the constant refrain of every Zionist, leader or member, veteran or newcomer, that I had occasion to talk to. If Zionists themselves harbour such feelings for their organization, one can easily surmise the attitude of those who are not in the organization. The best illustration of the lack of confidence in the Zionist Organization I found in the testimony of its president, who stated that although a number of Zionist leaders were ready some months ago to underwrite a substantial sum for an experienced executive to take charge of the organization, no qualified candidate could be found willing to assume the position because of the lack of confidence and trust in the organization.

It is amazing how, in such an atmosphere of distrust and acrimony, Chicago managed to escape the fate of scores of other Jewish communities where the Zionist Organization is but a faint memory of the past.

II

Reasons for the Disintegration of the Zionist Organization

Although every Zionist interviewed had to offer some explanation for the demoralized state of the Zionist Organization, not one suggested that the ideals or teachings of Zionism *per se* hindered the growth of the organization. The reasons offered varied with the particular experience of the individual member or leader with whom the matter was discussed. However, they can be easily summed up into two basic categories: (1) weakness in personality of leadership, (2) deficiencies in organizational technique.

After considerable thought and careful consideration of the arguments advanced by those who see the major difficulty in the calibre of Zionist leadership, I have come to the conclusion that, at best, such arguments are sublimated forms of ordinary gossip. Not that the personal element does not play its part in shaping the destiny of an organization. There is no doubt in my mind that the Zionist Organization of Chicago has suffered from time to time from inadequate leadership due to negligence of duty, personal incompetence or insufficient understanding of the aims of Zionism. However, I feel that, given man for man, leader for leader, for the same time for any average Jewish organization, Zionist leadership has not been worse than the average leadership of other so-called successful organizations. A normally functioning organization would ordinarily overcome the handicaps of occasional lapses in leadership; on the other hand, a demoralized organization can achieve little even with good leadership. Moreover, if it be true that Zionist leadership has always been found wanting, then again the indictment must be leveled against the organization which seems to attract the incompetent and untrustworthy for its leadership.

There might have been some ground for the "leadership" explanation of Zionist failure in Chicago, were Chicago the only delinquent Zionist Organization in the country. The fact, however, is that similar conditions in a more or less aggravated form prevail in practically every other community. This state of affairs in the country at large should convince those who are prone to attribute Zionist failures to one or another individual that the personal factor is of little moment in determining the destinies of the Zionist Organization. One would have to suffer from a severe case of Zionophobia to maintain that the Zionists all over the country have a monopoly on incompetence and insincerity.

I have dwelled at some length on this point because this "leadership" approach has a wide currency among Zionists and non-Zionists alike not only in Chicago but in the country at large. This tendency of blaming someone else, although quite human, is superficial and if continued unrestrained will lead only to further Zionist demoralization. The sooner Zionists learn to distinguish between situations and personalities, the sooner will it be possible for them to seek objective, underlying causes for the present ineffectiveness of the Zionist Organization and perhaps to find the necessary remedies.

The second major cause for the decline of the Zionist Organization, advanced practically by every Zionist I had occasion to interview, consisted in the charge that the Zionist Organization as it is constituted today is too impersonal and abstract to command the loyalty and interest of the average Jew. The Zionists I spoke to, almost without exception, maintain that even when they do attend Zionist meetings they do so only out of a sense of obligation and not because of any satisfaction that they may derive from them. They all seem to feel that Zionist meetings only serve to remind them of the burdens and responsibilities of the Zionist Organization without giving them the sense of association with a great cause. Many complained particularly of the lack of fellowship in the Zionist Organization. One veteran Zionist stated that although he had been actively engaged in Zionist service for more than

20 years, not one, of all the hundreds and thousands of people whom he had served and with whom he had worked, extended to him the traditional *mazel tov,* when his child was married. Such a complaint may sound somewhat trivial, but when one considers the great hunger of the cosmopolitan city dweller for companionship, one can understand the painful sensation that comes to one who meets with people time and again and yet finds them completely estranged from him. What impressed me about this Zionist worker was the apologetic tone in which he registered his complaint. He wanted to make it clear that as far as he personally was concerned, nothing could swerve him from his Zionist loyalties, but he thought that this aloofness demonstrated the extent of the aloofness and indifference that prevail in the Zionist Organization. That his experience is not unique is known to anyone who has had contact with the Zionist Organization.

The average Zionist program, in recent years, has been built upon an "appeal" of one sort or another. Little wonder that the average Zionist today finds in Zionism nothing but a source of irritation, for it has become associated with a cause which always asks for something but offers nothing in return. Such an attitude may seem unworthy to those who speak in terms of "self-sacrifice" and "pure idealism." I submit, however, that no matter how exalted the ideal, its potency, in the long run, is determined by the loyalty it commands from the individual, and such loyalty will be forthcoming only to the extent that the individual finds self-expression through that ideal.

One could indeed support the thesis that the effectiveness of a cause or an ideal can be measured by the character and degree of fellowship it generates. The history of early Christian fellowships is perhaps best known, but, by no means unique. Such fellowships among men engaged in the promotion of a cause or ideal can be found in every clime and at every stage of human society. In modern times, the story of comradeships in revolutionary movements is perhaps the most outstanding contribution of socialism to humanity's dream for a better society. In the case of modern Jewish history, the Hassidic movement with its warm sense of brotherhood is still too potent a factor among Eastern European Jewry to need further elaboration.

Similarly Zionism in its early stages, both in Europe and in this country, brought about a fellowship of men and women who, fired with the enthusiasm of a great ideal, were fused into a social organism in which the individual was not merely a "paid member" but a comrade and a fellow creator whose hopes and dreams and even material needs were the interest and concern of his fellow Zionists. It is this fine spirit of warm human fellowship that has made it possible for thousands of our pioneers to suffer danger and deprivation and yet to carry on their labors in behalf of a new Jewish order in Palestine. Only the genius or the unusually gifted can become creative by himself. The average person can achieve such self expression only through warm association with fellow men. The Zionist Organization today no longer provides such association. The weakness of the Zionist Organization should therefore be sought not so much in its limited membership as in its lack of Jewish fellowship.

It would be well to remember that the strength of the Zionist movement in its early days was not in the number of its members, but rather in the character of its membership. The greatest achievements of Zionism in general can be credited to a small minority, but a thoroughly organized minority.* One indeed can

* How a disciplined minority can be effective is seen from the figures of the last elections to the Zionist Congress. The ZOA, with a membership in this country of 27,353, polled 25,062 votes; the P.Z.Z.Z. party, with a national membership of 4,500, polled 36,719. In Chicago the Z.O., with a membership of 1215 polled 774 votes; the P.Z.Z.Z., with a membership of 300, polled 3861 votes.

hardly speak of a decline in the Zionist Organization from the point of sheer numbers. The fact is that (contrary to current impression) this year the Zionist Organization of America has the largest membership it has had for many years. (The average Zionist membership for ten years before 1937 was 18,500. In 1937 the membership is 27,353.) If old timers look back with justice to the glories of the past, these glories, it should be emphasized, were not in the number of members (they thought so little of numbers that they hardly kept any records), but rather in Zionist zeal and in the sense of belonging to a group and a cause destined to achieve great things for Israel. Although as Zionists the center of their hopes and dreams was in Palestine, their immediate task was right in their own cities and communities, namely, the task of converting the vast number of opponents and those who were indifferent to their cause.

Under those circumstances every new member added to the organization was a gain; every positive statement in behalf of Zionists in the press, a victory; every financial contribution, a source of encouragement. Compared with the mass membership drives, the long columns devoted to Zionism in the Jewish and general press, and the large contributions of today, the gains of the past seem picayune and insignificant. But the sense of achievement in those days was infinitely greater when one considers the great obstacles Zionists had to overcome and the personal satisfaction gained by the member in the process of achieving his goal. Both the pioneering and the progress were of his own doing and not merely a recital of heroic achievements by others.

With the issuance of the Balfour Declaration came a crucial change in the entire structure and program of the Zionist Organization. Zionism emerges out of its minority status into a mass movement; the point of gravity is shifted from the diaspora to Palestine. The confines of this memorandum neither call for nor permit an elaborate consideration of the implications of this fundamental change in Zionism. Still it is important for our purposes to note how this change affected the American scene as compared with that of Europe. In the European countries, the shift of emphasis from the diaspora to Palestine only intensified the relationship of Zionists to Zionism. The fate of thousands of European Zionists and that of their children became immediately tied up with the fortunes of the land whither many of them were to emigrate. There was no more need to continue the old ideological battles, but there was the great task of equipping and preparing themselves for the practical problems they were to face in the new Jewish homeland. The Balfour Declaration has therefore meant for Eastern European Jewry the intensification of Zionist ardor and endeavor. More than ever Zionism has become a way of creative Jewish living.

The change assumed, however, an entirely different meaning in America. The almost over-night victory of Zionism that followed the Balfour Declaration left the Zionists somewhat bewildered. Before the Balfour Declaration, to be a Zionist meant essentially to engage in propaganda; after its issuance, that ceased to be of major importance since the real function was no longer the recruiting of sympathizers, but the providing of means for the upbuilding of Palestine. It may sound paradoxical, but it is nevertheless true that the very realization of the Jewish homeland made Zionism less real to American Zionists, for the focus of attention was no longer on themselves and their communities but on the "halutzim," and Palestine, a land which was to help them solve the Jewish problem but not answer their personal needs. Moreover, the realities of Palestine were too grim and urgent to permit the old type of concentrated but limited Zionist activity. Modern Palestine called for great financial contributions, and as a result the interest of the Zionist Organization was shifted from Zionist enthusiasts

and idealists to men of means or those who could procure such means. The American traditional Zionist soon found himself on the periphery of the Zionist Organization and at times even outside it.

It is this change in the function of the Zionist Organization of America that accounts primarily for the break-down of Zionist morale in this country. It is this change which also explains the interesting phenomenon that, whereas in the past the Jewish intelligentsia constituted the very backbone of the Zionist movement in America, today it seems quite natural for the Jewish scholar, educator or artist to be outside of the Zionist organization, even though he is known to be a Zionist.

In more recent years, with the formation of the Jewish Agency and the transfer of the money raising activities to the Community Welfare Funds, even the Zionist contributors and campaigners have lost their immediate function. The outcome of all these changes is that the Zionist Organization of America has lost the loyalty of its old enthusiasts and intellectuals and is gradually losing the interest of its financial supporters, whose contributions are being solicited and administered by other agencies. Zionists therefore find little reason for maintaining their membership in the Zionist Organization.

In describing this situation I do not mean to imply that what was should have been. I for one do not believe that Zionism is identical with Palestinism. The history of modern Palestine is one long refutation of the "catastrophic" approach of some of the old political Zionists who believe that either Palestine is to be gotten in one lump through a charter or some other legal enactment, or there will be an end to Jewry and Judaism. Many more than forty years of wandering in the desert are ahead before the dream of the promised land will be realized. While in the desert, we shall need our Moses, teachers and leaders to train Jewry in the essence of Zionism and guide them in the ways of Jewish living. It should have been the function of the Z.O.A. to create the apparatus which would make such teaching and guidance possible.

Unfortunately, American Zionism like the Zionism of Western European countries has been essentially Herzlian in character. It has been primarily concerned with those "who have to or wish to go to Palestine." It has had no program for those "who cannot or who are not permitted to enter Palestine"; hence, the complete disregard for *"Gegenwarts Arbeit"* on the part of American Zionists, and the ensuing disruption of the Z.O.A.

The "catastrophic" bent of mind of American Zionists can be best illustrated by the attitude of the Zionist Organization to the question of Zionist youth education. Those who are familiar with the activities of the B'nai B'rith know that one of the major appeals of that organization today consists in its Hillel program. Just about the time Hillel came into being a group of devoted and able Jewish students were knocking at the doors of the Zionist Organization asking to be given the opportunity of serving Zionism by working among Jewish students, but that door has remained closed to this day.

Men of the type of the late Jacob De Haas were brutally frank in their statements that there was no room or need for this kind of investment of money and energy in Zionist educational projects. As political Zionists they saw no meaning for Zionism outside of Palestine, and therefore maintained that anything that deviated from the immediate building of Palestine was an obstacle to the realization of Zionism. Others, less frank or less intellectually honest than De Haas, offered lip service to the needs of Jewish education; but, unlike Eastern European Zionists who were in the very forefront of modern systems of Hebrew education, they had no share whatever in the rise of the modern Hebrew school and the development of modern Jewish edu-

cation in this country. They failed to assume responsibility even for such junior Zionist organizations as Avukah, and Young Judaea, which were told to shift for themselves. As a result, these organizations today are autonomous bodies without that sense of obligation to the parent Zionist organization which the members of the Hillel Foundation have towards B'nai B'rith.

The neglect of Zionist youth education is but one illustration of the implications of the political conception of Zionism which has prevailed among the official Zionist spokesmen in this country. As long as this view continues to dominate the policies of the Zionist Organization of America, it stands to reason that the organization will continue to limit itself to the raising of funds and the exercise of political pressure in behalf of Palestine. To achieve that they will need the support of the rich and the powerful. Youth may have zeal and energy, the intellectual may have understanding and devotion, but as a rule they have neither financial means or political influence and therefore they will continue to remain outside the orbit of the Zionist Organization. That means that as time goes on the Zionist Organization of America will be deprived even further of the understanding and the vision of Zionist intellectuals and the vigor and enthusiasm of Jewish youth.

While these radical changes in the Zionist movement have taken place, the older Zionists, having become more Americanized, discovered other opportunities for Jewish group living and gradually lost interest in the Zionist Organization. This transfer of membership was made easier by the fact that the new Jewish organizations that they joined, such as synagogues, fraternal orders and educational organizations, were rather friendly to Zionism. These Zionists just felt that in joining another organization they were not really forsaking their cause, but merely identifying themselves with organizations which afford opportunity for Jewish fellowship as well as for the expression of Zionist loyalty.

The younger generation, entirely uninformed of the underlying philosophy of Zionism, do not even sense the need for a Zionist Organization. Whatever they may know of Zionism is being entirely linked up with Palestine relief; and to their knowledge, Palestine relief is properly cared for by central Jewish philanthropic agencies. Being ignorant about Zionism, however, does not mean that the young people have no knowledge about Zionists. It has been my most unpleasant experience to find young people who are completely uninformed about some of the elementary tenets of Zionist ideology, yet are well versed in the shortcomings of the Zionist Organization or Zionist leadership, particularly when such shortcomings hinge about the political ambitions of some Zionist leaders.

By way of illustration of the attitude of the Americanized Jewish generation to the Zionist Organization, I should like to refer again to the Lawndale district of Chicago. In that district, which contains the largest Jewish community of Chicago, the membership committee, after strenuous and energetic efforts, succeeded in enrolling in 1936, 184 members. A few months later with practically the same leadership but with less effort, a campaign was conducted in behalf of B'nai B'rith which yielded a membership of about 700; in spite of the fact that the dues in B'nai B'rith were about four times as high as those of the Zionist Organization. The case of this district is by no means unique, but even in itself it is indicative of the indifference of the average American Jew to an organization which disregards his immediate need for Jewish self expression.

The Zionist Organization, having failed to serve the vital need for Jewish living in America, seems to be unable to hold the loyalty of the old or to engage the interest of the young, and as a result, it has proven to be the Jewish "no man's land."

(To be concluded in the next issue)